United Nations A/C.2/57/SR.24

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

Distr.: General
27 November 2002

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 24th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 4 November 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:	Mr. Suazo	(Honduras)
later:	Mr. Benmellouk (Vice-Chairman)	(Morocco)
later:	Mr. Suazo (Chairman)	(Honduras)

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02-67425 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 88: Operational activities for development (*continued*) (A/C.2/57/L.25, L.26 and L.27)

1. **Mr. Carpio Govea** (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolutions A/C.2/57/L.25 on pledging mechanisms and resource mobilization for operational activities for development of the United Nations system, A/C.2/57/L.26 on economic and technical cooperation among developing countries, and A/C.2/57/L.27 on operational activities for development. Two corrections had been made to the text of draft resolution A/C.2/57/L.27: the title should read "Human development report" and the words "take appropriate measures to make operational the above paragraphs and" should be deleted from paragraph 5. He recommended that the Committee should adopt the draft resolutions by consensus.

Agenda item 95: Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly (A/57/271, A/57/272; E/2002/48)

2. **Ms. Gebre-Egziabher** (Director of the UN-Habitat Office in New York), speaking on behalf of the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), introduced the reports of the Secretary-General on the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (A/57/271), on the strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/57/272), and on the coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda (E/2002/48). She wished to draw the Committee's attention to some of the reports' more significant findings.

3. The responsibility of UN-Habitat for coordinating the realization of the United Nations Millennium development goal of significantly improving the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers around the world by 2020 had provided the Programme with a much needed focus for its broad range of mandated activities. In that task, UN-Habitat was fully committed to working in partnership with other United Nations agencies to make the system more efficient for the benefit of the world's poor. During the previous year, for example, it had been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a plan to recruit local experts on human settlements to assist Resident Coordinators in the preparation of common country assessments, United Nations development assistance frameworks and poverty reduction strategy papers.

4. The General Assembly had agreed on the need for further strengthening of some elements of the Programme. One result of that assessment had been the decision to elevate to divisional status the Urban Secretariat Branch, which produced both the *Global Report on Human Settlements* and the *State of the World's Cities* report series. The General Assembly had also agreed that the United Nations Human Settlements Foundation should be granted divisional status, on condition that it was redesigned to carry out its original function as a global municipal development and housing finance facility for the very poor. Depending on the results of feasibility studies currently under way, that facility could become one of the most important tools in the fight against urban poverty.

5. The reorganization of UN-Habitat had improved the Programme's attention to both process and substance. Capacity-building had been recognized as one of the most effective developmental mechanisms and had therefore been elevated to branch status. The Executive Director had also requested and obtained branch status for the Programme's Urban Economy and Finance function.

6. In addition to the Programme's sharpened focus on the Millennium development goal of cities without slums, the international community had also called on UN-Habitat to play an increasing role in reconstruction following wars and natural disasters. UN-Habitat was the second largest reconstruction agency in Iraq, overseeing the resettlement of internally displaced persons in northern Iraq. In Kosovo, following the end of hostilities in 1999, the Programme's approach to reconstruction had included the development of policies, guidelines and procedures for efficient municipal administration, the regularization of housing and property rights, and the reconstitution of the property registration system. UN-Habitat had been active in Afghanistan for over a decade, implementing projects for community-based development. The new Government of Afghanistan had recently requested assistance in preparing and implementing a

comprehensive urban reconstruction and redevelopment strategy for the country.

7. Accessibility to water and sanitation were among the objectives of any strategy to upgrade slums. Since 1999, the Programme had been using funds from the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) and other sources to implement the water for African cities programme. It had also recently entered into an agreement with the Asian Development Bank and the Government of the Netherlands to implement a US$ 500 million programme on water for Asian cities. In response to the demand for the Programme's expertise and skills, the infrastructure section had been elevated to branch status and a Water and Sanitation Trust Fund had been established to mobilize resources for the water for African cities programme. The Programme appealed to those that were in a position to do so to make contributions to the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund.

8. The global campaigns on secure tenure and urban governance, which were designed as strategic entry points into the complex Habitat Agenda, had made good progress during the previous year. Campaigns had been launched in Eastern Europe, India, Namibia, Nigeria, the Philippines and South Africa and plans were under way for further launches in the Baltic States and in Burkina Faso. The two campaigns were being increasingly integrated, since the Millennium target on slums provided a common platform for both secure tenure and good urban governance.

9. Since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver, UN-Habitat had struggled almost alone to assist Member States in dealing with the impact of accelerating global urbanization. Since the Istanbul Conference (Habitat II), however, there had been a global realization that mankind was destined to become an urban species and that policies at all levels needed to catch up with that growing reality. The General Assembly had had the confidence in UN-Habitat to assign it new tasks in response to that reality.

10. The Programme's response capacity, however, was proscribed by the irregular and insufficient nature of the support it received. While it had successfully attracted very large sums of programme- and location-specific resources, the Programme's new mandates included recurring activities such as global monitoring and reporting, which would benefit from more sustained and predictable funding and other kinds of support. Member States could also participate in the work of UN-Habitat in ways that would be of direct benefit to themselves by establishing National Habitat Committees to help guide their approaches to urban challenges.

11. **Ms. Villalobos** (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that greater international solidarity and political will were required to achieve the Millennium development goal of significantly improving the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers around the world. The Group of 77 and China appealed to the developed countries to honour their pledge to provide financial resources and technical assistance to the developing countries to help achieve the universal goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements. The Group noted with concern that many developing countries had been unable to implement national plans owing to the lack of financial resources and technical assistance. Implementation of the recommendations made in the Monterrey Consensus, which were aimed at promoting cooperation between development financing institutions and local commercial partnerships, was one way of addressing that shortcoming. Another was a commitment by the developed countries to provide new and additional resources for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in developing countries. There was need for greater synergies and more effective cooperation with other United Nations agencies and programmes and with the Bretton Woods institutions in support of the Habitat Agenda.

12. The role of UN-Habitat should be further strengthened, particularly in the areas of capacity-building and technical assistance. In that connection, the regional programme activity centres had played an important role in promoting the objectives of the Habitat Agenda. The Group of 77 and China noted with satisfaction the active participation of developing countries in technical cooperation programmes aimed at expanding their capacities, improving conditions in slums and implementing the related recommendations of the Habitat Agenda. At the same time, however, the risk and disaster management programme and the Cities Alliance, both of which had suffered a decline in the level of resources available for projects and programmes, should be further strengthened.

13. **Mr. Jakobsen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said he welcomed the change in status of UN-Habitat, which should enable it to play a more strategic role within the United Nations system. There had been a number of positive developments in that regard, such as the strengthened collaboration between UN-Habitat and UNDP to set up Habitat Agenda focal points in selected UNDP country offices, and the establishment of a World Urban Forum. In addition to its important role in achieving many of the essential goals contained in the Millennium Declaration, UN-Habitat should make a stronger contribution to sustainable development programmes and the implementation of Agenda 21. Moreover, it should continue to promote decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities. Given the need to focus the spending of scarce resources, the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure and the Global Campaign on Urban Governance were useful points of entry for effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The multi-year funding framework used in other funds and programmes could provide a useful basis for the review of the financing and work programme of UN-Habitat. It was an important tool in efforts to show accountability and establish close links between resources, activities and results.

14. **Ms. Aalberg** (Norway) said that the revitalization of UN-Habitat had upgraded its normative role, redressing the balance between normative and technical cooperation activities. A balance must also be struck in funding those activities, primarily by increasing the amount of non-earmarked contributions to the Human Settlements Foundation. While her country had set an example by doubling its non-earmarked contribution to approximately $1.3 million, it was also important to broaden the donor base. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/272), the six major donor countries alone accounted for 80 per cent of general purpose contributions in 2001. The Committee of Permanent Representatives of UN-Habitat should be consulted closely in the review of its financial base and work programme, prior to an extensive debate at the meeting of the Governing Council in May 2003.

15. In order to achieve the goal contained in the Millennium Declaration of improving the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020, UN-Habitat would require strong support from a wide variety of partners. Fruitful cooperation with local authorities would be crucial in implementing the Habitat Agenda, given the need for action at the local level. The World Urban Forum could be a model for enhancing civil society involvement throughout the United Nations system. Nevertheless, increased support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in their advocacy role was needed to ensure the continued success of the Forum. UN-Habitat was well placed to secure the support of the World Bank and other multilateral and bilateral agencies behind the Cities Alliance, which must be given sufficient opportunity to prove itself.

16. *Mr. Benmellouk (Morocco), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

17. **Mr. Shamanov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was generally satisfied with progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The goals of the Habitat Agenda and of the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda (Istanbul+5), and the Millennium development goal of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020, would require much greater coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system, the international financial institutions and other partners, in line with the emphasis of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

18. The leading role in that regard belonged to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in its new form. It should develop its operational role in seeking productive and effective cooperation, diversification of financing for technical cooperation projects and programmes and new forms of international assistance. The improved status of the former Commission on Human Settlements would contribute to those goals, and to sustainable urbanization.

19. The World Urban Forum had begun an innovative dialogue among governments, civil society, businesspeople and scientists. Its work in the future should be directed towards substantive recommendations on sustainable urbanization and protecting urban areas from terrorism and dangerous natural and man-made phenomena. There was scope for cooperation between UN-Habitat and the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and its partners.

20. The majority of the Russian Federation's population were urban dwellers, and sustainable urbanization and urban governance were topical issues. The experience of the organizations of the United Nations system was valuable in helping to address those issues.

21. **Mr. Gamaleldin** (Egypt) said that his delegation fully supported efforts to strengthen the mandate and status of UN-Habitat. He welcomed the addition of adequate shelter to the international development agenda following the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as the new target on sanitation linked to the Millennium Declaration goal of halving the number of persons without access to safe drinking water by 2015.

22. His delegation attached great importance to the role of UN-Habitat in addressing the dangerous situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where Palestinians were denied access to shelter and basic services. At the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, the international community had undertaken to strengthen the protection of civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Convention. The Security Council and the General Assembly had reaffirmed the applicability of the Geneva Convention to all Arab and Palestinian territories on numerous occasions. However, Israel continued to flout international law by building illegal settlements and denying help to refugees in returning to their homes. He called on the international community to step up pressure on Israel to comply with Security Council resolutions, and to support further initiatives such as the visit undertaken by UN-Habitat to the Jenin refugee camp in May 2002. A comprehensive report should be drawn up concerning the housing situation in the occupied territories, containing recommendations for action by UN-Habitat.

23. He particularly welcomed the efforts of UN-Habitat with regard to institutional capacity-building for developing countries and enhancing the productivity of urban informal sectors. It needed to strengthen its relationship with international and regional development banks, and to foster new partnerships for implementing the Habitat Agenda. It was important for the World Urban Forum and Advisory Committee of Local Authorities to retain an advisory function, and not to affect the intergovernmental guidance provided by the Governing Council and Committee of Permanent Representatives.

24. **Ms. Wang** Ling (China) said that, despite progress in improving housing and living conditions in many countries over recent years, numerous difficulties still remained, particularly in developing countries. Between 40 and 50 per cent of city dwellers continued to live in slums, and at least 100 million people in the world were homeless. There was a significant discrepancy between reality and the commitments set out in documents such as the Habitat Agenda.

25. International cooperation should focus on economic development and poverty eradication, as the most effective means to resolve human settlement problems. Nevertheless, strategies should be formulated and implemented at the national level, according to the specific situation and capacities of each country. In view of those specificities, there could be no uniform model for human settlements. In particular, policies relating to decentralization and the role of local authorities could not be dictated without due regard for national legal and political frameworks. In her country, for example, the central Government played a coordinating role, provided financial support and mobilized the active participation of all sectors of society. It would continue to follow that approach in implementing the Habitat Agenda.

26. **Mr. Oratmangun** (Indonesia) said that the goal of achieving a significant improvement in the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020 was particularly daunting, given the trend of rapid urbanization and the estimated number of over 800 million slum-dwellers in 2001. Besides leading to problems of poor housing and lack of access to services, slums tended to perpetuate poverty, spread illnesses and create intense pressures on local resources. In spite of efforts to enhance the administrative and financial management of cities, slums continued to undermine the capacity of the urban environment. The major challenge for the international community was to overcome the remaining obstacles to effective implementation of the various programmes of action contained in the Habitat Agenda, the Millennium Declaration, and other texts. To that end, renewed political will and an injection of financial resources were of primary importance. UN-Habitat should identify innovative ways of mobilizing financial resources. Fresh partnerships were required to inspire

urban regeneration, including city-to-city cooperation, which offered a cost-effective solution for the exchange of best practices, and the more active involvement of civil society.

27. **Mr. Al-Shamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that about 100 million people lacked the basic requirements in terms of adequate shelter, and health, social and educational services; millions of other people were homeless. That increased the urgency of speeding up the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, the Habitat II Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium. It was also essential for the donor and developed countries to fulfil their commitments towards the developing countries, particularly the least developed.

28. The Government of his own country had given the question of human settlements top priority within the framework of a policy of decentralization, economic freedom and partnership between governmental and private institutions. The Government also supported various housing schemes for its citizens and had established new cities and villages equipped to modern technological standards, had donated land for house-building and provided grants and long-term loans to help people build their own homes. It also built houses for free distribution to citizens with low incomes. The Government also attached great importance to the dissemination of the best practices for improving living conditions and had established in 1975 a biennial prize in the amount of US$ 400,000 which helped to enhance public and international awareness of housing and human settlement issues.

29. While the United Nations was striving to improve the living conditions of millions of people in the developing countries, the international community witnessed the killing and destruction perpetrated against the Palestinian people and their cities and villages by the Israeli forces. Israel was continuing to demolish houses, hospitals, schools, places of worship and farms as part of a deliberate plan to destroy the infrastructure of Palestinian cities and villages and the cultural and religious heritage of such cities as Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah. The continued aggression by Israel was a gross violation of the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention and of the principles and purposes of the United Nations, which implied the development of cities and human settlements and the improvement of the living conditions of their inhabitants.

30. His delegation therefore called on the international community and the Security Council to exert pressure on Israel to cease its aggressive acts against the Palestinian people and to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. He also requested that the sanctions imposed on Iraq be lifted as soon as possible in order to give that country the opportunity to begin the rehabilitation and improvement of its economy and of the living conditions of its people.

31. His Government was providing financial, and humanitarian aid to many poor countries for the building of homes, hospitals, schools and mosques. It had also undertaken to reconstruct the Jenin refugee camp in Palestine, which had been destroyed by the Israeli forces. The most recent government project was the construction of a residential city in the Gaza Strip which would be provided with all basic facilities and infrastructure with the aim of easing the suffering of the Palestinian people.

32. **Ms. Wanyoni** (Kenya) associated her delegation with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

33. Because of the failure to meet commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul, widespread poverty, inadequate financial resources, high rates of urbanization, especially in developing countries, and lack of capacity of the UN-Habitat secretariat for coordination of activities, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda had not met the expectations of her delegation. General Assembly resolution 56/206 had underscored the crucial role of UN-Habitat in achieving the objectives of the Habitat Agenda and the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium. The new standing of UN-Habitat gave human settlements a higher visibility both within the United Nations system and elsewhere. Her delegation hoped that the Governing Council of UN-Habitat would make the necessary decisions in May 2003 to institutionalize the recent changes.

34. UN-Habitat required adequate and predictable funding to enable it to fulfil its mandate and to reduce its reliance on unpredictable voluntary contributions. Her delegation therefore welcomed the proposed revision of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-

2005 to include subprogrammes on the financing of human settlements and monitoring of the Habitat Agenda. It also welcomed the recognition by the World Summit on Sustainable Development of the important role of adequate shelter, water and sanitation for sustainable development. The depressing fact that an estimated 56 per cent of Africa's urban population lived in slums and that the situation continued to worsen called for a concerted effort to prioritize the provision of adequate shelter in poverty eradication policies and programmes.

35. At the national level, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda was constrained by, among other things, inadequate funding. There was a need to establish effective housing finance mechanisms for the implementation of national plans of action and to address the needs of the urban poor. In collaboration with UN-Habitat, her Government was currently working on a programme to improve the living conditions of slum-dwellers and was interested in participating in the Cities Without Slums Subregional Programme for Eastern and Southern Africa and planned to establish a fund to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

36. In the context of urban governance, her Government was carrying out a plan to decentralize and strengthen local authorities. Plans were also under way to launch campaigns on secure tenure and urban governance and to coordinate road development and maintenance at the local level.

37. **Ms. Zubčević** (Croatia) expressed the satisfaction of her delegation with General Assembly resolution 56/206, as a result of which the secretariat of UN-Habitat, servicing the Governing Council, had become the focal point for human settlements and for the coordination of human settlement activities within the United Nations system, thus enhancing the status of the Governing Council as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. The coordination and coherence of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda would be strengthened by the introduction of a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism consisting of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Governing Council of UN-Habitat.

38. Her delegation strongly supported the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at both the country and local levels. In that context, the Croatian National Habitat Committee had been established as a broad-based platform for the preparation and implementation of plans of action based on the Habitat Agenda. On the Committee's proposal, the Government had adopted a three-year programme of work in accordance with the Habitat Agenda, the Istanbul Declaration, the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Urban governance was therefore a major component of the Croatian development strategy for the twenty-first century.

39. In order to improve its capacity and keep UN-Habitat continuously informed about implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the national, regional and local levels, the Croatian National Habitat Committee had proposed the inclusion of the UN-Habitat methodology in the statistical research programme of the National Institute of Statistics beginning in 2003. The results of four pilot projects which were under way would contribute to the development of indicators necessary for urban governance compatible with specific conditions in her country, which would result in recommendations to the Government on ways of promoting the methodology at the regional and local levels and on the promotion of an improved national statistical programme.

40. The Croatian National Habitat Committee would be open to all interested parties, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society in general. In its outreach programme it would specifically target those who were in charge of urban governance at all levels, as well as experts, educational institutions and the mass media, in order to raise public awareness of urban governance with a view to the more effective participation of the public in decision-making regarding cities and human settlements in general.

41. Her Government strongly supported regular reporting to UN-Habitat on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and also encouraged UN-Habitat, in collaboration with other United Nations bodies, to continue its efforts to provide technical and normative assistance to Governments. Her delegation also supported efforts to enhance the operational role of UN-Habitat in order to achieve more productive and effective collaboration with the agencies, to diversify sources of financing for technical cooperation projects and programmes and to identify new avenues for inter-agency collaboration.

42. *Mr. Suazo (Honduras) resumed the Chair.*

43. **Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

44. The World Summit on Sustainable Development had identified the provision of shelter as an important dimension of poverty eradication. The new target agreed by the international community of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people who did not have access to adequate sanitation would complement existing development goals. The Summit had recognized the special difficulties faced by African countries in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration. In that connection, the international community had been called upon to provide African countries with support to strengthen national and local capacities in the areas of sustainable urbanization and human settlements. It was also important to note the significant number of partnerships that had been launched at the Summit, which his delegation hoped would complement the implementation of the intergovernmental agreements. Another highlight of the World Summit on Sustainable Development had been the activities related to the Water for African Cities Programme, which had also seen the announcement of new partnerships by donors and African Governments.

45. The pace of urbanization challenged the capacities of cities to provide basic services such as water and sanitation and his delegation was therefore pleased with the progress that had been achieved so far by the Water for African Cities Programme, which had shown that improvement in the supply and management of water were crucial to the improvement of living conditions and the health of the population in cities.

46. His country remained committed to the Habitat Agenda and continued to make strides to realize the goal of providing adequate shelter and to improve human settlements. That was a formidable task but the progress achieved so far had been gratifying. Over the past seven years more than one million houses with individual tenure had been provided to the poor in both rural and urban areas and basic services, such as sanitation, water, shelter, electricity and land, had also been provided for the first time to a large proportion of the population. Despite those successes, one of the main remaining challenges was urbanization and the integration of the poor and vulnerable. Steps had been taken to build the capacities of municipalities and local authorities to enable them to manage the phenomenon of urbanization. The introduction of a social housing policy was also aimed at promoting and empowering social housing institutions.

47. His country looked forward to further collaboration with UN-Habitat and hoped that the upgrading of the programme would raise its profile and enhance the consideration of issues related to human settlements within the United Nations system.

48. **Mr. Rolle** (Bahamas), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that those States wished to associate themselves with the statement made by the delegation of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

49. CARICOM considered adequate housing as a fundamental human right and it therefore welcomed the steps taken to transform the Commission on Human Settlements and its secretariat into the United Nations Settlements Programme to be known as UN-Habitat. Such a combined approach would further enhance the coordination of human settlements activities within the United Nations system and would assist developing countries to improve the living standards of their people.

50. The CARICOM member States continued to face a number of challenges with regard to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, including the macroeconomic transformation of the region in response to globalization, increasing social inequities, the rapid expansion of squatter settlements and the informal housing sector, and the unavailability of funds for housing at the household level. The threat of natural disasters such as hurricanes posed further difficulties for the region, particularly with respect to reconstruction of property and access to insurance. There was a need for efficiently managed building codes meeting the needs of lower income households, especially the elderly, the disabled and disenfranchised youth, and for an integrated approach to problems relating to human settlements. Accordingly, CARICOM welcomed the work of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean with respect to capacity-building and technical cooperation, and called for assistance in the development of effective land policies and land management systems.

51. The Millennium development target of significantly improving the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020 was challenging but not unattainable. Local authorities had an important role to play in implementing the Monterrey Consensus by addressing the development challenges facing developing countries. CARICOM particularly welcomed the call in the Monterrey Consensus for investments in basic economic and social infrastructure.

52. CARICOM welcomed the political emphasis placed on sustainable development and reiterated the need for international support to enable UN-Habitat to strengthen its global programmes. In that connection, CARICOM welcomed the adoption of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which outlined action to improve access to land and property, to adequate shelter and to basic services for the urban and rural poor. In conclusion, he pledged the support of the CARICOM member States for the work of UN-Habitat and looked forward to continued cooperation by that body in CARICOM's effort to strengthen shelter and settlements programmes.

53. **Mr. Gospodinov** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the vulnerability of millions of people living in substandard conditions in urban environments continued to be a matter of concern for the International Federation. The continued deterioration in the situation in many countries was exacerbated by the relentless movement of populations from rural to urban areas, particularly in developing countries. In 2006 it was expected that, for the first time in human history, more people on the planet would be living in urban than in rural areas. That trend seemed to be almost inevitably accompanied by the proliferation of substandard housing and poor planning. The consequences of the lack of planning, inadequate or non-existent urban services and poorly constructed dwellings had been particularly severe in the areas of health, education, employment and crime.

54. Extensive research conducted by IFRC in a number of countries had shown that lessons to be drawn from the situation could be adapted to any national environment. For example, Governments could establish clearer building codes, incorporating minimum standards for housing and introduce measures to ensure adherence to those standards. Risk reduction and land-use planning should be incorporated into infrastructure design. The inclusion of beneficiary communities in the planning process would also help to avoid negative factors such as the absence of suitably located schools, hospitals, clinics and urban services. Communities relocating, including those relocated after a national disaster or as part of the urbanization process, should be provided with housing conditions to facilitate their transition to environments in which they could find employment and live with dignity. There was a clear need for improved inter-agency collaboration on those and related issues. Unfortunately, despite statements made and resolutions adopted at conferences around the world, collaboration on problems related to urban settlements was at an unacceptably low level.

55. Risk reduction and the link between relief and development had been the theme of several statements made by IFRC during the current session of the General Assembly. Risk reduction was also the theme of the 2002 edition of the World Disasters Report, which had been introduced during the session of the Economic and Social Council, thus indicating the significance attached by the United Nations system to risk reduction.

56. In the context of its commitment to work closely with its partners in the United Nations family, the Federation had recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme. Another issue of central importance to the Federation was the efficient management of disaster response, including the application of appropriate minimum standards. In that connection, the International Disaster Response Law (IDRL), a project of the Federation on which it had made a statement in 2001 to the special session of the General Assembly on human settlements, was now well advanced.

57. The Federation hoped that Habitat would recognize the value of the IDRL project to its own initiatives and programmes and looked forward to Habitat's contributions to the debate when the issue was considered by Governments and member societies of the Federation at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2003 in Geneva.

58. **Ms. Lewis** (International Labour Organization) said that employment and income opportunities were crucial to improving the living conditions of millions of slum-dwellers. Thus, the campaign for decent work

pursued by the International Labour Organization (ILO) played a significant role in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The close links between poverty reduction, decent work and slum upgrading were also reflected in the long-standing partnership between UN-Habitat and ILO. A series of subregional workshops had recently been held in Nairobi as a joint initiative between the two agencies, designed to facilitate the exchange of good practices between municipal directors and national support agencies concerning urban service delivery and employment creation. They had also cooperated during a World Urban Forum session on employment promotion strategies to reduce urban poverty, an approach subsequently reinforced at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. At the country level, joint initiatives had been pursued in the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Cambodia and Afghanistan, and ILO had been making technical contributions to the work of the Cities Alliance. The programme of work following the International Labour Conference of 2002 concerning the informal economy would include, inter alia, improving access to property and labour rights, promoting gender equality, enhancing dialogue with workers in the informal economy and improving regulations and procedures for creating small enterprises. Consultations with UN-Habitat were currently taking place with a view to promoting employment for urban youth. Referring to the draft resolution on promoting youth employment (A/C.3/57/L.12), recently sponsored by 106 Member States in the Third Committee, she said that such collaboration at the country level would provide an adequate response to the growing urgency of the situation for urban youth.

59. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Nigeria) said that the transformation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements into a full programme (UN-Habitat) was a welcome step, since homelessness afflicted all societies, whether rich or poor. The homeless were also the most vulnerable individuals in society, and their situation was exacerbated by extreme poverty, unemployment, ignorance and disease.UN-Habitat had two main goals: the provision of adequate shelter for all, and the attainment of sustainable development of human settlements in an urbanizing world.

60. Implementation of the Habitat Agenda was a major challenge. The fact that Habitat issues had been among the focal points of the World Summit on Sustainable Development was proof that lasting peace, democracy, human rights and social justice could not be separated from economic well-being and sound environmental protection. The Summit had emphasized water, sanitation, energy and biodiversity, but its Plan of Implementation did not seem to have acknowledged the centrality of human-settlements issues to the eradication of poverty. Efforts to improve water, sanitation and energy would come to nothing in slum conditions, so the modest target of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020 would require more support for UN-Habitat.

61. The strengthening of UN-Habitat was a welcome step. The Programme should be treated like all other United Nations funds and agencies, because of its pivotal role in ensuring adequate shelter for all and sustainable urbanization. Nigeria supported the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure as a strategy to spearhead global shelter efforts and thus make a major contribution to poverty alleviation by promoting the rights and interests of the poor, particularly women. However, its success would depend on the accommodation of cultural diversity, belief systems and national legislation. Nigeria also supported the Global Campaign for Urban Governance, which would contribute to alleviating poverty by promoting inclusion, accountability and transparency. It had launched its own national campaign for good urban governance, reflecting the role of local government as the basic unit for implementation of development programmes in its federal system. It advocated participation and partnership between the Government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society in that field.

62. Capacity-building, manpower training and the use of national expertise and institutions for implementationwould reflect true ownership of the process and have a considerable impact on the lives of the poor in general and of slum-dwellers in particular. In that connection, the economics of the slum environment should be understood: in Nigeria, as in most of Africa and the developing world, urban housing was financed mostly with personal and family savings. Access to adequate housing would be impossible without access to land, credit and employment. Recent human development indicators had shown that poverty was increasing in many developing countries. In that context, the efforts of UN-Habitat in the development and strengthening of

housing finance systems and enhancing productivity in the urban informal sector were commendable.

63. Unfortunately, most of the general contributions to the Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation came from a very small number of countries and were not predictable and special-purpose contributions often involved conditions. Nigeria welcomed the efforts of UN-Habitat to examine options to revitalize the resources of the Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, as an important channel for funding. It looked forward to hearing recommendations for achieving that goal, and encouraged donors to contribute to UN-Habitat.

64. Since UN-Habitat had become a fully fledged programme of the United Nations, its role in addressing new challenges and promoting new partnerships should be made more visible. Its operational activities would benefit from inter-agency partnership and coordination within the United Nations system.

65. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the activities of UN-Habitat were important and could not be separated from the activities of other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. The transformation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements into the United Nations Human Settlements Programme would encourage its integration at decision-making level with those agencies, funds and programmes, but the problem of funding remained, particularly for regional offices, and new ways of supporting the Programme were needed.

66. As the ILO representative had emphasized, improving living and health conditions in pursuit of the Millennium development goals was vital, but there were other challenges to be addressed, including poverty and underdevelopment. Planning and implementation should be methodical.

67. Among the additional issues to be considered was the demolition by the Israeli authorities of homes and a range of facilities including hospitals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, such as the Golan Heights, in breach of many resolutions and conventions, including the fourth Geneva Convention (Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war), particularly articles 56 to 58. The matter was not a new one, but it was of direct concern to the General Assembly. The crimes in question should be brought to the attention of the international community. It was more important to end the premeditated destruction and deliberate impoverishment ofthe Palestinian people than to take remedial action afterwards. The Programme had a mandate to examine colonization, so advantage could perhaps be taken of the presence of its representative to hear what attention had been devoted to the matter.

68. In the same vein, the change to the mandate of the Programme had not yet been adopted, but the Syrian Arab Republic wished to draw attention to the need to make the position on tenure legal and proper, so that programmes did not violate international law.

69. **The Chairman** indicated that the representative of Israel had asked to reply to certain statements. Under rule 115 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly,the number of statements in exercise of the right of reply was restricted to two per item, with the first statement not exceeding five minutes, and the second not exceeding three minutes.

70. **Mr. Nadai** (Israel) said that his statement would be briefer than the rules allowed. He wished to exercise his delegation's right of reply to the statements by the delegations of the United Arab Emirates and the Syrian Arab Republic. In the last year, the Palestinian campaignof terrorism against the citizens of Israel, begun in September 2000, had continued and even escalated. The Palestinian decision to engage in terrorism had harmed the economic, security and living conditions of all the peoples of the region, as terrorism was by its nature indiscriminate. The security measures which Israel had been obliged to implement in the face of an unrelenting threat of attack had indeed in some cases affected the daily lives of the Palestinians, but those measures were a consequence, rather than a cause, of the situation in the region. The predicament of the Palestinian people was the inevitable result of a conscious decision to forgo negotiations in favour of violence and terrorism. Israel hoped that those who truly cared about the plight of the Palestinians would refrain from using the issue as a political platform for attacking Israel.

71. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic), exercising his delegation's right of reply to the statement of the representative of Israel, said that in the interests of the Committee he could not refrain from commenting on the lies and allegations it had heard. In his view, nobody believed them, and the international community was well aware of the barbarous and inhumane practices being perpetrated, the latest

example of which had been the massacre in Jenin. That showed disregard not just for the Palestinians, but for all the peoples of the world. That flagrant act had been added to the blockade and the attacks against thousands of people and Christian and Muslim holy places. His delegation could not accept the justification offered for those acts, which were violations of the fourth Geneva Convention. The international community had condemned the long-standing Israeli occupation. An Israeli rabbi had even declared a *fatwa*, exhorting Israelis to steal olives in Palestinian territories. The approach was that the end justified the means.

72. **The Chairman** announced that the Committee had concluded the general debate on the item under consideration.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.